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A Word From The Editor

Harvey Lee

"One day in every century Death takes on mortal flesh, better to comprehend what lives she takes must feel like, to taste the bitter tang of mortality:

And this is the price she must pay for being the divider of the living from all that has gone before, all that must come after."

-Death



When I picked up my copy of *DEATH: the high cost of living* issue no. 3, I found to my dismay, that the double page spread of Death and Didi was misprinted. Needless to say, I was mad. Two weeks later, Jeff Lewis had informed me of the redistribution of the issue, with the double page spread corrected. So I went down to Amazing Stories the next day and picked up a copy.

There were some differences, such as: 1) no cover price, 2) there was an indicia this time around, 3) this is not a second printing, nor will you ever find those words within that tome and 4) did I mention that the double page spread was corrected?

I was told that DC Comics had shipped this particular batch free of charge to the comic shops to be distributed to costumers who purchased *DEATH*. Ya gotta respect a comic company that acknowledges their mistake and are willing to go out of their way to make up for it. This comic company has class people. You don't see Marvel admitting they made a mistake. Hell, they'll just classify it a "Collector\$ item" and reprint it with a foil cover or something and even **keep** the fargin' mistake. Anything for a buck those bloody wankers.

Luckily I was purchasing the *DEATH* series at Amazing Stories, so I got my copy for free, otherwise I would have paid the \$2.50 for it, like the rest. Very reasonable arrangement I might say. Too bad for the people shopping at Graphic Fantasy though. When I went there to investigate, they had price tags on the cover (not bagged but **on** the cover) that read "2-50". Sigh. They expect you to pay, plain and simple. Oh well. That's their prerogative. One of the many reasons I don't deal with them. Good choice, don't ya think?



OPINIONATED

Warren Frey



Let me make one thing clear from the outset of my diatribe. As a rule, I like anime. I'd rather watch *Gundam 0083* than the tripe that passes for entertainment on television any day, and I could see a Miyazaki film over and over before getting tired of it. Having said that, there are some things about anime that REALLY annoy me. From small details to major plot points and story telling techniques, there are ways of doing things in anime that quite simply clash with my artistic sensibilities.

For one, why is it that in the middle of intense action scenes, the main characters always seem compelled to break up the flow of the action with a meaningless conversation or a speech? A perfect example of this is in *Riding Bean* where, just as Bean Bandit and Rally are about to escape from their captors, they slow down and proceed to chew the fat with the local constabulary. **Come on!** Does this strike anyone as just a little unrealistic, not to mention disruptive to the flow of the story?

Another aspect of anime that is sometimes annoying is its patent obviousness. This is not a universal crime; *Akira* is so befuddling as to be cryptic, and a few other anime manage to inject an air of subtlety into their narrative. However, many anime seem more concerned with atmosphere and character development rather than developing a surprising storyline. For instance, in *Gundam 0083*, it becomes quite obvious that when Lt. Burning shows his Captain a picture of his mate, he is de facto being sentenced to death. *0083* compounds the lack of drama by allowing Burning possession of the secret plans of Gato's Jion forces, which he then attempts to read to his cohorts before (surprise) blowing up. Even less surprisingly, Burning's underlings swear revenge upon the forces of Jion and death to all who follow

her. This sort of silliness is acceptable in a OVA with no history behind it, but *Gundam* is a long running series that should not need to stoop to the patently obvious in order to tell a story. Then again, *Gundam* started its long run with Amuro Rey being the son of a Gundam designer (coincidentally), and the only man who could save his side from destruction (again very coincidentally), so maybe one should refrain from criticism of the series when it began in such a well, silly way. *Gundam* is not immune to these rather ridiculous plot devices.

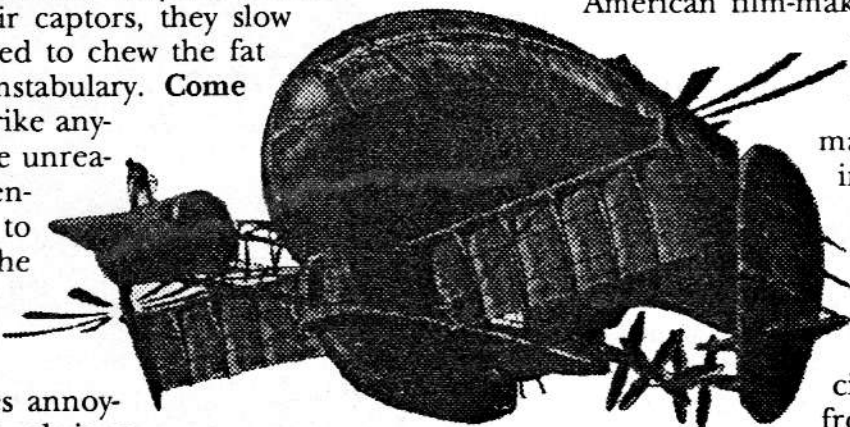
Uratsaki Doji is perhaps the only anime where girls are violated at random by demons and villains, only to declare at the end of it all "I'm so happy"! Indeed, bodily harm seems to be the ultimate turn-on in most hentai anime, a story aspect which is not only stupid but also somewhat reprehensible.

However, for all the silly devices used by anime to tell a story, there is one which North American film-makers have rarely if ever

used; complete silence. If used sparingly, silence during dramatic scenes can be incredibly effective, as evidenced by the scene in *Laputa* where Pazu breaks through the cloud cover of the flying city, or in the scene from (of all things)

Project A-ko 4, where A-ko tries valiantly to reach the starship taking C-ko from her but cannot. Thus while anime uses some storytelling techniques and devices that are questionable at best, its approach is a refreshing change from the North American style of dramatic presentation.

New art will only be created through diversity, and so while anime's approach seems at times alien to us, in the end it serves to remind us we are watching a different culture's point of view and to broaden our limited horizons.



Reflection of Truth

FMS Story Feature

Wolf Wikeley



The silver Acura Integra clung intimately to the road, riding its curves and drawing speed from its solid immovability. Within, a softly attractive girl with long, lustrous onyx hair sat at the wheel, and beside her was a passenger - a gentleman whose hair was neither as lustrous nor as long, but of the same tone. They conversed - and the low volume at which they spoke, barely audible over the gentle hum of the motor, was evidence of their close familiarity with each other's voices.

"I always find it nice to be able to see our names on the shelf in the record store," the man mused. His wardrobe as well as hers, from his designer spectacles to her silver and diamond necklace, indicated a good measure of success.

"Yes," she agreed. "And of course it's nice to be offered dinner on the house, even at a place like tonight... I still think it was proper to decline, however, since we certainly could afford paying for ourselves."

"Absolutely, Ginko. As expected, the food was delicious, and well worth what we paid. But even now I remember when we were only dreaming of such a lifestyle."

"Me too..." Ginko concentrated on the road for a moment, making the turn from the east-west freeway to the southbound route. Evening darkness was beginning to descend on the metropolis; shadows were beginning to grow. "You were still battling at both guitars and keyboards, and I had my precious Gibson but no amplifier... Why did you give up guitar? The change seemed gradual as it happened, but now..."

"I wasn't getting anywhere... I might have improved, but maybe not. And finally, it was worth it, I think, because now I'm so much better at keyboards... Remember the time we played on campus, up in my office? We must have stayed till three..."

"And everyone else left..." Ginko nodded,

recalling perfectly.

"And then it was just us, and the night, and the beautiful view from the office window... That was the first time I told you I love you..." The man placed his hand on Ginko's knee, gently.

"I could never forget that feeling, Katsuhirow... It was hard for you to say it, and you hardly needed to, anyway, since you showed it all the time... It took me even longer to respond..." She met his eyes for an instant; volumes of wordless adoration were exchanged.

"But you did, ne?" Katsuhirow mused, touching for a moment the only piece of jewelry he wore. Silence followed for a moment or two. Katsuhirow touched the control for his powered window, lowered it slightly to let in the cool evening breeze.

"*Suzushii wa nee*," Ginko remarked, on the character of the breeze. "But I feel something... sad, lonely in the air..."

"Let's ignore it," Katsuhirow invited, moving his hand from her knee to her shoulder. "*Mochiron, kimi ni yokattara bakari...* Naturally, only if it's okay with you."

"*Zehi yoitteba... Atashi no kangae datte wa.*" Ginko replied, smiling sweetly. "By all means, it being my idea." They stopped at a red light, nearing the residential district where they lived. She took the opportunity to mess his forelocks up in a very friendly way, but somehow the way they were caused to fall across his left eye looked sad, not as she'd intended. "Do you remember the first time we made love? Just the day after our wedding... You cried... And they were not tears of joy..."

"I explained it all to you, angel," Katsuhirow told her. He tried to brush his forelocks back out of his face, but they persisted in hanging down. "And it wasn't your fault. It's gotten better..."

"You're no longer afraid of me," she said, almost whispering. As the Acura pulled into the street on which their house was, another, almost plaintive wave of love was exchanged between her eyes and his. "Yet it's always been so gentle..." They were finally approaching the

driveway to their none-too-modest house. "I've always tried so hard..."

Ginko parked the car, shut off the engine. And then Katsuhirow was taking her into his arms, gently, as if he expected her at any moment to pull away. She leaned further into him, as if to say that she wasn't going anywhere. And then they were kissing, a familiar yet incomparably special touch between the wife and the husband.

After a minute, the couple got out of the car, walked up the driveway to the front door. And were suddenly shocked; someone was waiting for them on the steps. She was about the same age as them, also with long black hair, though dressed far less formally than they were. She sat with her back to the door and her head rested on her bent knees - looking incredibly forlorn and sad. Katsuhirow seemed to recognize the tan suede jacket she was wearing, and the red Honda parked across the street, even before she lifted her eyes to look back at him. Sensing immediately that something was very wrong, Ginko held onto her husband; indeed, his knees did seem to have grown weak. The girl who had been waiting for them rose to her feet. Tears sparkled in her eyes, catching the luminance of the house's lights. Those eyes seemed unable to fully meet Katsuhirow's own, but she held her hand outstretched, and for some reason, Katsuhirow took it in his. Ginko looked on, puzzled until her husband spoke the girl's name.

"Kimiko," he whispered, with a tone of sadness that Ginko had come to know quite well.

"Katsuhirow..." the girl whispered back...

"Katsuhirow, I... I don't think you should pick me up after class any more, okay?" she asked. Both were in the kitchen of her apartment; he was boiling lettuce and she was chopping peanuts.

"Why?" he asked her. Despite the warmth he felt just being near her, the hand in which he held the pair of cooking chopsticks began to shiver.

"People are saying things," she said, and her expression indicated that embarrassed her. He smiled, remembering a number of occasions when he'd made her blush.

"And you don't want them to get the idea that... There's anything going on between us?" There was something playful in his tone; he was inviting her to

share a special secret with him, hoping she'd get the message.

"Of course... And why should they? I mean..." She left her sentence unfinished. Suddenly, Katsuhirow's smile was gone. His hand's shivering became worse. He steadied it with great effort.

"Do you mean... You don't want there to be anything going on?" Hope that she would deny it, hope that she would reach out to him, was dissolving in tears that Katsuhirow was determined to hold back.

"I want you to be my friend," she told him, looking away to chop some more peanuts. Katsuhirow's hand dropped closer to the boiling lettuce; he ignored the scalding heat.

"I want to be your friend, too, Kimiko," he reinforced to her... But I feel I have a right and a responsibility to admit that I see the potential for more... I won't deny what I feel - that would be wrong..."

"I don't want to hurt you..."

"Surely you must have seen how I felt... Didn't I make it clear to you?" Katsuhirow recalled how he had always shown her the love in his eyes, in his voice, without ever having to mention the words themselves.

"I'll admit... I haven't been ignorant... I'm sorry..." Her tone was darkening, too, just as his was; neither had ever seen the other like this, and both were frightened of it. Frightened of the final truth.

"Do you know how long it takes for me to come to trust someone like I trusted you?" Katsuhirow asked. Now he was stabbing the lettuce, rather than gently pulling it out of the water.

"Do you think you misplaced that trust?" she asked, and her own voice was by no means devoid of bitterness.

"No... I... I'm sorry. I can't deal with the way I feel... I was expecting for us to be honest with each other today... But I was not expecting this." On the contrary, everything Kimiko had said and done had led Katsuhirow to anticipate quite the opposite. Now, he became so silent and sad that Kimiko couldn't stand it. She gripped him by the shoulder, looked into his eyes and asked him to smile for her. But that only hurt him more, and she turned away again.

"Why?" he finally asked.

"I can't be more than a friend to you," she told him simply.

"Why can't you?"

"I've told you about my ex-boyfriend... I'm still..."

"You're still in love with him..." Katsuhirow swallowed hard. "I understand that. It's all right to feel that way... Maybe I am asking too much..."

"Will you still be my friend?" Kimiko asked.

"I'll try... But I can't guarantee anything... It's very hard for me right now..." He refused to look at her, now - refused to let the love he felt so strongly compete with the new, equally strong pain. "I can't stay for your party, though... And I'd like to go now..."

As she drove him back to the University campus, neither was paying proper attention to the road, or to anything else. It was a miracle that they weren't involved in any accidents, though her small car got far too close to the others on a number of occasions...

All three were inside the large house now, sitting in the grand living room. The centerpiece of the living room was a beautiful enlargement of the cover from Ginko and Katsuhirow's CD. Husband and wife sat beside each other on the loveseat, one plaintively holding onto the other's hand, while the girl who drove the red Honda sat in the armchair. Ginko had generously provided a glass of mineral water for everyone, but she was the only one drinking.

"What are you doing here, Kimiko?" Ginko was finally the one to ask, since neither her husband nor the other girl seemed able to talk. She had met Kimiko once or twice, and had heard everything Katsuhirow had to say about her.

"The past two years have been horrible... So lonely... No one cares any more... I can't find any of my friends... I haven't been accepted to the translation program... All I could think of was the one person I remembered who cared for me... Cared for me the most, and whom I hurt so badly... Katsuhirow... And then I saw your CD in the store, and I bought it. Co-production of Ginko Akazuki and Katsuhirow Aoshin... And it gave the address for your fanmail, here, in this city... Where we first met. So I drove all the way back... And I'm here..." Regret, and loneliness, clouded over Kimiko's eyes; she had once affected green-tinted contacts, but now there was only the natural brown.

"I feel very sorry for the way things have turned out for you," Ginko said. Katsuhirow nodded his agreement. "It was courageous of you to seek someone you knew so long ago,

and drive all this way, not knowing what to expect."

"I had only hope." Kimiko's voice was weak, fragile. "But I knew you two were still friends, still working together. And your project is beautiful..."

"Kimiko," Ginko began. "We're not just friends any more..." Katsuhirow softly squeezed her hand, trying to interrupt her. She turned to face him directly, to read his features.

"Please, Ginko, could Kimiko and I speak alone?"

"No," Ginko told him, positively and definitely. "*Sonna koto wa yurusan te...* I can't permit it. After what we've shared, Katsuhirow, I'm not leaving you alone with anyone..."

"*Anta no yowu ja nai wa,*" Kimiko said sharply to Ginko. "It's not your concern..."

"Yes it is," Ginko retorted. Seldom was she angry, but her love for her husband made her protective. "You..." She pointed an accusative finger at the other girl. "All you had to do is walk away from him two years ago, leave him more ruined than you could imagine. All you had to do was forget what he'd given you and walk... I've lived with what you did to him - I've lived with the scars he carries. When he gives me something, I've got to hold onto it tight, guard it like my life, before he believes that I'm truly accepting it! Each time he tells me he loves me, I've got to treat it like the first time! And when we make love... I've got to convince him that it's real, that I'll never hurt him even when he's vulnerable!"

"I... I didn't know... How... What had happened to him..." Kimiko's eyes were full of tears now. So were Katsuhirow's.

"You've never loved him like I have... Nobody could give me more, nobody could be more dedicated to me... When you threw that kind of love back in his face... Kimiko, we're married, but sometimes I still get the feeling he's expecting me to throw it all away, no matter what I tell him..." Katsuhirow nodded, admitting it to himself and to his wife. "I'm sorry you've had such a worse turn now, Kimiko. But there's no longer anything here for you... You gave it up years ago..."

"But I never gave up," Katsuhirow finally spoke up. Though his voice was a faint whisper, he commanded both Ginko and Kimiko's attention. "No matter how bitter I

felt, how hurt... I always loved you, Kimiko..."

"*Sore o iwanaide, anata,*" Ginko said to her husband, clutching his arm with gentle strength. "Please don't say that..."

"What you love about me is my honesty, Ginko," Katsuhirow said. "I don't hide anything I feel... I know you could tell anyway... To say that the pain of her rejection, after playing me like a toy for two months, was enough to extinguish the love... That would be a lie... I still love you, Kimiko..."

Tears came to Ginko's eyes, as a moment she had always feared was realized. Even at her wedding, the most perfect day of her life, she had foreseen such an instant. People had mistaken the tears then as an expression of overwhelming joy. Now, there could be no mistake. Kimiko's eyes cleared, somehow, as she made contact with the man she had abandoned. Hope shone from behind the deep ochre of her irises.

"You do?" she whispered to Katsuhirow. Ginko's grip was loosening. Kimiko was about to reach out to him.

"But I love my wife more than you could possibly understand... What I felt for you never had a chance to grow. You never allowed it. When you took anything from me, it was out of selfishness, and never because you thought of the two of us, together... But there's nothing I can't share with Ginko... I didn't know what real love was until I met my wife... I only knew how to give it..." Ginko was yet unable to tighten her hold on Katsuhirow. But Kimiko was no longer reaching for him.

"Katsuhirow..." Kimiko began to fold in on herself again. The light in her eyes was dimming.

"Whatever help I can give you as a friend, I will consider giving... But right now, I want you to leave my house..."

Getting her to leave had been a slow, bitter process. In the end, Katsuhirow had been forced to walk out onto the driveway with his cellular phone, threatening to get her towed, before Kimiko had started her car and driven away. Now, Ginko and Katsuhirow weren't talking to each other. The former was in the kitchen, holding a glass of mineral water and staring at the note that had been affixed to the refrigerator since they'd been living together. 'You're all that matters to me, my Silver Girl. -Katsuhirow.' The latter was in the living room, staring up at the cover of their CD, wondering

if he should have tried to get his wife to take his last name. But, though that might have avoided the situation that had just occurred, it would have solved nothing.

Without warning, the glass fell from Ginko's hand. Katsuhirow heard it shatter on the tiled floor. Heard his wife begin to cry, as she knelt down to try and sweep up the glass. But she wasn't being careful enough, and soon she had a small cut on one of her fingers. Katsuhirow quietly knelt beside her, with a dustpan, and swept up all of the variously sized fragments. And then he set it aside, moved to face her. Her hair hung down like a waterfall of black silk, obscuring her face. He knew, though, that she was trying to stifle her sobs. Gently, he reached for her hand, and she didn't resist. He raised her finger to his lips, surrounded the tiny wound with warmth, took in the salty taste of her blood. And when he let go, the bleeding had lessened. Summoning all her strength, she let her eyes rise to meet his. Katsuhirow brushed her hair back; his hand remained cupped over her right temple, the thumb softly tracing her earlobe.

"I'm so sorry, Ginko... I can feel how badly I've hurt you... I've never wanted to do that..."

"I love you so much, Katsuhirow... When will you ever be able to see and believe that? When will you trust me?" Her unwounded hand found its way to his face, rested on his right cheek.

"I believe in you, angel..."

"*Anata mo shinjiteiru no,*" Ginko whispered. "I believe in you, too... Will we ever be the same?"

"*Mae yori... Kimi no ai de...*" Katsuhirow promised. "More than before... Because of your love..." He leaned forward, kissed her, reached out with his other arm and pulled her closer. Never before had Ginko felt him touch her like this - still gentle, but firm, unwavering. More than before, it made her want him never to let go. They rose from the kitchen floor together, stood in the centre of the house they'd built. When they looked into each other's eyes, they saw only reflections of each other.